

Christian Maturity

by Peet Botha

The sermon discusses the concept of Christian maturity and the characteristics of a mature Christian, emphasizing the importance of faith, knowledge, and spiritual growth in our lives.

Duration: 1:15:48

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-3, Hebrews 2:3, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 4:1, Hebrews 9:11-12, Hebrews 9:24, Hebrews 10:18

Topics: "Maturity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the concern among some Christians that Jesus Christ has not yet returned. He emphasizes the importance of remaining steadfast in their faith and not turning back to Judaism. The speaker highlights the need to combine knowledge of Christ with personal faith in order to truly experience salvation. He urges the audience to fix their thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest, and to continue growing in their understanding of Christ and repentance from sinful acts.

Transcript

Lord, take these words that we will read out of your Bible, your word this morning, make them living words. O Holy Spirit of God, you know each and everyone who is in this auditorium this morning. And you know that you have brought us together here to hear your word.

Please prepare our hearts so that we may receive your word. Be in our midst, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I would like to share this morning some thoughts with you concerning the first six chapters of Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews where some say it's more than a letter, it's really a sermon in itself addressed to the Jewish Christians. But before we do that, I would like to relate a little story to you.

Because it's my prayer that this morning we will really see and taste like the psalmist says the Lord Jesus Christ. Once Professor Paul Tillich on a tour in America addressed some people, pastors and students and lay people who came to hear him. He's a theologian and it happened at a university and there were quite a few people there who came to hear this most famous professor speak.

And he was speaking on the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he was telling those who were there why he had certain problems with the Lord Jesus being the Son of God and him being born from a virgin. Right in the back of the auditorium sat a pastor, an oldish man.

And whilst he was listening to the professor he was munching away on an apple. And after some time the professor had finished speaking, there was time for questions or comments and he stood up. And he was busy eating his apple.

And he said, Professor I'd like to ask you a question. He held up his apple and he said, Professor what is this in my hand? And he answered and said, It looks like an apple. And he said, Professor what does this apple taste like? Is it sweet? Is it sour? Professor said, Well, sir I can't tell because I haven't tasted that apple in your hand.

And the old pastor said, Professor that's right. Why is it that you haven't tasted my Jesus? After listening to you it's clear that you haven't tasted my Jesus as well. Why is it that you haven't tasted my Jesus as well? It's because of the Lord Jesus that indeed we will see and we will taste and we will experience the Lord Jesus as the Son of God.

The letter to the Hebrews were written to the Jewish Christians to tell them how the Lord Jesus is superior to anything and anyone in the current world. It was written before the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 after Christ. And those of you who are knowledgeable about the letter to the Hebrews will know that it speaks about the high priests and the priests and the sacrifices and the rituals and all of that.

It was a time in which the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Essenes were the religious parties of the time. And the high priest, the chairman of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council was also chosen from the Sadducees, always chosen from the Sadducees. They were two very well known rabbis of that time.

Gamaliel and Eliel were the two rabbis of that time. And the Pharisees, for example, had within Judaism more than 600 laws that were required to be kept by those who believed or the believers of that time. And then there was the time where the Greeks were the pantheon of gods.

And the Romans were the emperor worship. And it was a time in which the Christians, the Jewish Christians, were persecuted. They were persecuted by the Jews, they were persecuted by the Greco-Romans, they were persecuted for their faith.

And Judaism wasn't a second-rate religion in that time. Coming out of the Old Testament, it was divinely revealed, for that time it was the best religion. The prophets spoke much about how God should be worshipped.

But then Christ came and He fulfilled everything that was prophesied from the Old Testament through Judaism. He fulfilled the law, He fulfilled the prophets, He came and He was just something so special out of the hands of God. And this message of Christ, the Redeemer, the Son of God, was very difficult for the Jews to accept.

They expected the Messiah to come for many centuries, but when Jesus came, it was difficult to accept Him as the Messiah, and they were entrenched in their traditions and their way of worship. And when Jesus came and He freely gave forgiveness for sins, and He freely provided eternal life, it is as if He stood against what they have always believed, and it was very difficult for them to accept this Jesus proclaiming to be the Son of God. And it would seem from the book of Hebrews, that those who accepted Jesus Christ, find them very often sliding back into the religious practices and traditions of Judaism.

So the author of Hebrews has written this letter to comfort these Christians and to encourage them to remain true to Christ. He told them Christianity is superior, Christ is supreme, and completely sufficient for

salvation. So there are certain high moments in this book.

Hebrews begin in the first three verses by emphasizing that the Old as well as the New, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament is a revelation from God. The author shows that Jesus is superior to angels. Chapter three, that Jesus is superior to their leaders.

Chapter four and further, that He is superior to the priesthood. Christianity has a better covenant. Chapter eight, Chapter nine, a better sanctuary.

Chapter nine and ten, a better and more sufficient sacrifice in Jesus Christ. I think for yourself, these people have been in Judaism for centuries and now they have to hear that Christ is greater than Moses. Christ is greater than the Old Testament priesthood.

They have come with the Old Covenant and now they hear that the New Covenant in Jesus is superior and has replaced the Old Covenant. The high priest, the priesthood, the sacrifices are no longer valid and no longer needed. Christ Jesus alone can forgive sins.

The high priest who always went into the holy of the holies is no longer necessary. Jesus Christ Himself guarantees our access to God the Father. Now the author is writing to these Christians and he wants to strengthen them and warn them and encourage them to remain true to Christ.

And so this morning we would like to look at the question, what is a mature Christian? Now the author writes in chapter two verse one these words, We must pay more careful attention therefore to what we have heard so that we do not drift away. He starts off by taking them back to what they have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ in the beginning when they came to Christ. There was a time in each one of our lives in which we were babes in Christ.

Those days of beginning when we say Lord I want to commit myself to you, I want you to live in my heart. And the author of Hebrews comes with a softness to his people and he says, Remember the first words that you heard. Indeed he says it is so important to remember those first moments that you committed yourself to Christ because that would keep you from drifting away from Christ.

Those first moments when you were touched by the Lord Jesus Christ, that excitement that you remember, the moment that you received salvation and it was so vivid and so clear to you, remember that day. And he says that the Lord himself in verse three, This salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him. He says the Lord himself gave that salvation.

He says don't forget that. Then he speaks about a few things and then in chapter three verse one, again he says these words. And he reminds them of a very very important aspect of the Christian life.

Therefore holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He says to them, you who have heard this heavenly call from God, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. And now that you've remembered the beginnings, fix your thoughts on Jesus Christ who is superior even above Moses which is written a little bit further in chapter three.

And this verse would have been very important to those Jewish Christians because for them the highest human being in their existence was the high priest. He was the highest human authority and now the author comes and says to them, even higher than that is Jesus Christ. Fix your thoughts on Jesus Christ, the one who remained true to the one who sent him.

Now he's reminded them about the beginnings and he's reminded them to fix their thoughts on Jesus Christ. So some of the Hebrews who received this letter, who heard this letter being read to them might have been just on the verge of getting back into Judaism. They might have been in the process of losing this eternal rest in Christ.

Now in chapter four verse one, he starts a new argument. Because some of these Christians might have thought that Jesus Christ has not returned. They expected a quick return and because he has not returned they could go back to Judaism that Christianity was perhaps not true.

And he says to them, therefore since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. In the words of the theme of the youth conference, he says to them, this is yet the time to still come to Christ Jesus. And he says in verse two, for we also have had the gospel preached to us just as they did, but the message they heard was of no value to them, those who have lost the rest.

Because those who have heard did not combine it with faith. This illustrates a problem for that time which is a problem evident in our churches today as well. Many people have the knowledge about Jesus Christ.

Many people can tell you about the Lord Jesus Christ. Children go to Sunday school. Grown ups go to Sunday school perhaps.

We sit and we listen to services and sermons concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. But this knowledge of Christ is never combined with faith in Jesus Christ. And in chapter four the author says that knowledge in itself is good, but it is not enough.

You have to have faith, personal faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. After he has discussed these things in the first five chapters, we come to the text for this morning in chapter six, verse one. To the author of Hebrews, all that he has said in the first five chapters, to him belongs to the beginning of becoming a Christian.

Chapter six, verse one. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death. And of faith in God, instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, and God permitting, we will do so.

He says that these things are things which we had to learn in the beginning. In some translations it speaks about the doctrine of faith, or the doctrine of the Christian faith. The author here uses the Greek word *logos*, in other words, the words of faith.

He speaks of this as those things that every Christian needs to know. He speaks about the doctrine of Christian faith, and he says that these things, this knowledge, yes it's vital, but there is more to Christian faith than just the knowledge of these great learnings of the Christian faith. And he says to the Hebrews, let's go beyond these things.

He says, let's leave these beginnings, these elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity. And it's this word maturity that caught my eye. And I asked myself, what is meant by this word maturity? Can we learn from this discourse between the author and his hearers, can we learn something which is to us important in our Christian life for this day, concerning maturity in being a Christian? Now one way at looking at maturity, or to evaluate spiritual maturity in our lives, is to look at the choices that we make as

Christians.

And the author of Hebrews notes various ways in which our life as a Christian can be matured in the way that we make choices. And the way that we present ourselves spiritually shows many times the spiritual level or the spiritual growth towards maturity in our lives. So I'd like to highlight for you this morning nine such cases out of the book of Hebrews that we could use to evaluate our own spiritual maturity.

Where you make certain choices on the basis of your knowledge and your relationship with Jesus Christ, which shows that you can make mature choices in your life. Now the book of Hebrews has only got thirteen chapters. So you can take this book in the week or days to come and read through it yourself and get out of it the richness of what is being said.

I'm sure you can preach for a whole year only on the book of Hebrews. The first point is that a mature Christian chooses to teach others rather than being taught the whole time of his life. Surely in a Christian's life there come a time when you are mature enough to start teaching others about Christ.

Surely there must be a time in your life where the Christian faith has become so part of you and the Lord Jesus Christ has become so part of you that you can start leading others to Christ and not always being led yourself. Surely in the life of a mature Christian there must come a time where you can sit down with somebody and counsel that person in the ways of Christ. You can't stay a baby in the face all of your life.

How would it be if you send your child to school in grade R and by the time of grade 12 it's still a grade R child? The purpose of education is to take a child of 6 years and over an extended period of time educate and mold that child into a mature young person. A young person who can take responsible decisions and to be accountable for those decisions that this person takes. So also with a mature Christian there comes a time when you must be able to in a mature way relate the Christian faith to others and lead them to Christ.

Sharing the gospel, teaching the gospel so that others may become mature as well. A mature Christian has developed depth of understanding of the Christian faith. In other words there is insight in what Christ Jesus has come to do.

There is an understanding of the will of God for an individual's life. There is an understanding and an insight in what God wills for the individual, for the community, for the nation, for the Christian faith. And the author of Hebrews says to the Christians, stop struggling with the basics of the Christian faith.

Go beyond where understanding is the norm rather than just the basic words, the logos, the words that you have heard. So the mature Christian can make choices on the basis of understanding the will of God. The will of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The third point, a mature Christian can evaluate himself or herself in the light of scripture rather than just criticizing himself or herself. Self-criticism is always done in relation between you and the next person. Self-criticism where as mature Christian evaluation is where you evaluate yourself in the light of Jesus Christ and his word.

So a mature Christian won't criticize himself or herself in the light of other Christians but will deliberately by choice evaluate him or herself in the light of Christ and his word. In the fourth place, a mature Christian will deliberately choose to seek unity and not to seek disunity. Many places in the Bible we are called upon to be one in Christ Jesus.

Indeed we can only be one in Christ Jesus. And a mature Christian will seek that unity to be one in Christ with all around him rather than promote disunity based on differences. Now here is another point which is quite interesting.

A mature Christian would desire spiritual challenges rather than desiring entertainment. Is it not true if you look at the world or at worldly Christians or at nominal Christians that they'd rather seek entertainment than seek spiritual challenges like sharing the gospel, like being a missionary, like preaching the gospel, like changing your world? It's easy to promote disunity. It's a challenge to promote unity.

It's easy to fall into self-criticism. It's a spiritual challenge to evaluate oneself in the light of scripture. It's easy to stay with the basics.

It's a spiritual challenge to develop understanding and insights about God's will for ourselves. It's easy to go with the trend but it's a spiritual challenge for a Christian to stand and to be able to stand when there's persecution because of one's faith. A next point.

A spiritual mature Christian will study carefully the Bible and observe carefully the lives of others who proclaim to be Christians rather than following opinions of people and half-hearted efforts to realize the word of the Lord in their lives. Let's put it in other words. A mature Christian would want to sit at the feet of Rabbi Jesus rather than to talk with the friends about the trivial things of this world.

But rather sit with other Christians and speak about their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and what God has told them and revealed to them and being taught in that manner than to go out with the friends into this world and experience the light entertainment of this world. The seventh point. A mature Christian has active faith rather than doubt or cautiousness concerning the Christian faith.

Mature Christians do things. In other words, they live their faith in Jesus Christ. They are bold in the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ.

They don't hesitate to testify that Jesus is their Lord and their Saviour. They can tell you about the walk with Jesus. Just think about Paul when he confessed about all the things that happened to him.

But each and every time he says, it's the grace of God, he could testify to Christ working in his life and being with him. In the eighth place, a mature Christian has confidence rather than fear for this world. Yes, confidence because it's no longer I but Christ in me.

That is the norm. He has confidence because he knows the victor. He knows the one who has overcome this world.

He knows the one who sits on the right hand side of God. He has confidence because he has saving knowledge rather than just knowledge about Christ. He knows Christ personally in a very intimate way.

The mature Christian has confidence and don't go around being fearful of each little thing that happens in his life. He has confidence because he has Christian hope. He is not hopeless.

Lastly, a mature Christian would be able by choice to evaluate his feelings and experiences in the light of Christ's word. A mature Christian will evaluate his experiences in the light of his own feelings. In the light of his own opinion.

In the light of his own knowledge. But the mature Christian would immediately run to God to evaluate his experiences and his feelings to see if it's in line with what God wants. Now friends, if you take these nine principles, if you can, remember them.

If you take these nine principles and you evaluate yourself, whether you are spiritual mature or still a spiritual babe, then you can come to some answer for your own life. And the author of Hebrews says to the Jewish Christians, don't remain with those things that you've heard in the beginning, but go beyond. Get understanding because then you will be able to withstand the persecution that's coming your way.

And encourage them to remain true to the faith. Now it takes time to become a mature Christian. That is true.

But it's also true that daily commitment to Christ and daily service to Christ and the brethren will bring maturity over time. And a mature Christian won't be swayed by the fashions of this world. And a mature Christian won't be shaken by the temptations of this world.

But it's important to realize if you trust Jesus Christ for your complete salvation, he will work it in you. And he will complete this process of transformation from a babe to a mature person, from a babe in Christianity to a mature Christian, he will work it in you. But what does the author says to the Christians, the Hebrew Christians, he says to them, you may have to commit yourself and you have to obey Jesus Christ in everything.

Because a mature Christian lives a life of obedience to Christ and a life of complete trust in Christ Jesus. And he says to his fellow Christians, he says, you can have complete victory in your life if you don't give up Christ Jesus. Because that was the danger with the Hebrew Christians, that they would give up Christ and return back to Judaism.

Now friends, it's for us to take these words and to take this truth about Jesus Christ and to go to him and ask him to realize this maturity in our lives. Because all of us here need to become mature Christians in Christ. Boldly and actively being busy with serving Christ and the others and proclaiming his gospel of salvation.

Because in the latter part of Hebrews, from chapter 10 onwards, he speaks to these Christians which he has now encouraged and he warns them about the consequences of rejecting Christ. In the same letter, chapter 10 further, because the readers are exhorted to hold onto this new faith, to help one another, to encourage one another, to stay one. And important to look forward to the coming of Christ.

They are told that there are just two kinds of people in this world. The saved and the unsaved. Those who reject Jesus Christ will go lost.

And if these Christians, these Jewish Christians return to the Jewish faith, Judaism, they will go lost because of the choice that they have made. One of the greatest chapters of Hebrews is Hebrews 11. In chapter 11, the author uses examples from the Old Testament to show people, the people of his time, how to endure in the faith.

He uses examples and people from the history of Israel. And he shows them how to live daily a committed life to Christ. Spiritual heroes, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and others.

And he says, look at them, but look beyond. What was possible for them is possible for you. So it's important for us to realize today that whatever we consider important in our lives, whatever we consider as the focus of our lives, Christ Jesus is better.

He is far greater than any focus we might have other than Him. He was a perfect revelation from God. He was the final and complete sacrifice for sin.

He is also the one who has compassion and mercy and grace for each one of us. So we have shared many thoughts out of the book of Hebrews this morning. The most important is that Christ Jesus is greater than anything in this world that we can know.

He is the Son of God. He is the Lord of Lords. The King of Kings.

He is the greatest. There is no other religion that can offer you that. There is no other religion that can offer salvation that is only possible in Jesus Christ.

And the author of Hebrews painfully, carefully showed it to his listeners. And then we have shared some thoughts on the maturity of a Christian. What makes a Christian mature? Allow me to just mention the nine characteristics of a mature Christian to you once again.

One, a mature Christian teaches others about Christ Jesus and the Christian faith. Two, a mature Christian has depth of understanding of God's will. Three, a mature Christian in the third place will evaluate himself or herself in the light of the revealed Christ Jesus.

Four, a mature Christian would seek unity rather than disunity. Always seeking unity. In the fifth place, a mature Christian always desire spiritual challenges rather than the mere entertainment the world can offer.

Sixthly, a mature Christian would carefully study the Bible and observe the teachings concerning Christ. In the seventh place, a mature Christian is seen by the active faith that he has. In the eighth place, a mature Christian is confident rather than run around fearfully in this world.

In the ninth place, feelings and experiences are evaluated in the light of God's word. As the old preacher said, the story that I've told you may be that we taste Christ in his greatness this morning. May it be that the sweetness of a choice to follow Christ is evident in our lives this morning and not the bitterness of rejection.

Indeed, may it be that we experience this morning as we sit here the saving grace and the saving salvation that Christ has offered each one of us this day. The choir is not going to sing. Some of them have gone out.

So we will just pray then and end the service. Let us pray. We thank you for your precious word, O Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for this voice coming to us over a period of two thousand years and strengthening us this morning to remain true to you, our Lord. Exhorting us not to remain with the first things that we heard about you and the faith, but that we would grow to spiritual maturity in you, our Lord. O Holy Spirit of God, by your grace, by this living word that we have experienced this morning, we pray that you would lead us to spiritual maturity.

Give us insight and understanding, knowledge and wisdom, so that we may be true Christians in this world. Please continue with us into this day, O Lord. May your hand be upon us.

Keep us safely. We ask this in your precious name. Amen.

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